

ADDITIONAL VIEWS OF THE HONORABLE DAVID OBEY

Two issues addressed during Committee consideration of the FY 2006 Defense appropriations measure warrant further discussion.

Iraq and Afghanistan “Bridge Fund”

In May, Congress passed an FY 2005 emergency supplemental funding bill that provided \$75.9 billion for continuing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even as that bill was being signed into law, the military let it be known that additional supplemental funds would be needed by October to avoid severe financial dislocation.

The Republican budget resolution set aside \$50 billion to cover the FY 2006 costs of the war. In response to the military's pleas and “consistent” with the Republican budget resolution, this bill included \$45.3 billion. At current expenditure rates, this funding will only cover 6 months worth of the wars' costs. Thus, the Republican budget resolution fails to accurately account for the full year's cost of the war, thereby continuing the fiction created by the Bush Administration surrounding our ongoing military involvement in the region. Since this bridge funding is only adequate to cover the costs of the war for half the year, the hard reality is that before the year is over the Pentagon will have to ask for more money for the war. This likely will “bust” the recently passed Republican budget resolution by more than \$40 billion.

I offered two amendments related to this bridge funding. The first would have, in essence, required that the Majority take up a real budget resolution that included the full cost of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The second would have paid for roughly half of the bridge fund by reducing the size of the tax cuts for people making more than \$1 million a year in order to reduce the amount the deficit will rise when the full annual costs of the war is finally revealed. The Committee rejected these amendments.

The purpose of both amendments was to force the Administration and the Congressional Majority to begin to face up to the full cost of the war in Iraq. As the Washington Post recently noted its editorial of March 12, 2005:

For the third year in a row, the Bush administration has chosen to fund operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with a grab bag of other programs, outside the normal appropriations process. To call this emergency spending is farcical. Though the precise cost of military operations was not known, there was no reason, especially as the war continued, not to budget for most, if not all, of it in the ordinary course of business. After a single emergency supplemental, the war in Vietnam was financed through regular appropriations.

Of course, if the Administration requested funds for Iraq and Afghanistan through the regular appropriations process it would force tradeoffs within the Federal budget, such as spending cuts or tax increases, to pay for the war. These are precisely the types of

tradeoffs the Administration and the Congressional Majority have avoided and continue to avoid. Instead of making the tough choices, the cost of military operations and related expenses for these two engagements has been added directly to the deficit, forcing future generations to pay for this Administration's failure to pay the full price of its Iraq policy.

To date, according to the Congressional Research Service, the Defense Department has received \$277.1 billion in "emergency" funding for combat operations, occupation and support for military personnel or supporting operations for Iraq, Afghanistan and for enhanced security at military installations. Nearly 60 percent of these funds – \$165.8 billion – were provided after the President declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq. Nearly 70 percent of the \$277.1 billion provided – \$192 billion – is solely for the Iraq war. Should Congress approve this \$45.3 billion supplemental, which will only fund operations in Iraq for half the year, total funding for the Iraq war will reach nearly \$240 billion. And this is not the end. Tens of billions, if not more, will be required as the Army fully expects to still be in Iraq at least through January 2007.

To put all this in context – even as Congress prepares to bust the Republican budget by more than \$40 billion to pay for the cost of this misguided war, the Republican majority is simultaneously slashing the Labor-HHS-Education bill by \$1.6 billion, decimating programs for children and gutting efforts to protect workers wages, all in the name of fiscal responsibility. The Majority's brand of fiscal responsibility is farcical at best, duplicitous at worst. It is past time the Republican Majority comes clean about the full cost of the Iraq policy. The Congress is being set up to bust the budget by an estimated \$40 billion to pay for the remaining costs of the war – an amount more than 20 times larger than the amount they are saving by cutting the Labor-HHS bill.

House Democrats make no apologies for demanding greater accountability from the Administration about its conduct of the war in Iraq. Our efforts, however, should in no way be construed as criticism of our troops. Democrats strongly support the men and women of our military. Many of us worked in the last supplemental to increase the maximum death benefit for service members. We have also urged the Administration and the Congress to provide additional resources for the Veterans Administration so that returning service members receive the health care they deserve.

It is this support for the troops that leads to question the Administration's management of the war and to demand greater accountability. The Moran amendment, which was included in the most recent supplemental, is an example of the type of oversight Congress must conduct. The Moran amendment directs the Secretary of Defense to fully evaluate the situation in Iraq and provide Congress measurable, achievable criteria that will provide an accurate assessment of our progress in the war. If one thing has become clear through the fog of war, it is that this Administration will not come clean unless the Congress continues to ask questions. We must keep pressing for answers.

Religious Freedom at the Air Force Academy

The Los Angeles Times reported on April 20, 2005, that an atmosphere existed on the campus of the U.S. Air Force Academy that appeared to tolerate disrespectful treatment of persons who were not evangelicals. Air Force officials have acknowledged the problem, which initially surfaced in early May 2004 when a survey of present and former cadets revealed that some students felt that “born-again” Christians received favorable treatment and that persons of faith that did not consider themselves born-again had been verbally abused.

I am pleased that the Committee responded to these reports by adopting an amendment condemning coercive or abusive proselytizing at the Academy and reaffirming that the military must be a place of tolerance for all faiths and backgrounds. The text of the amendment follows:

Sec. 9012. Sense of Congress and Report Concerning Inappropriate Proselytizing of United States Air Force Academy Cadets.

(a) SENSE OF CONGRESS. - It is the sense of Congress that -

- (1) the expression of personal religious faith is welcome in the United States military, but coercive and abusive religious proselytizing at the United States Air Force Academy by officers assigned to duty at the Academy and others in the chain-of-command at the Academy, as has been reported, is inconsistent with the professionalism and standards required of those who serve at the Academy;*
- (2) the military must be a place of tolerance for all faiths and backgrounds; and*
- (3) the Secretary of the Air Force and other appropriate civilian authorities, and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and other appropriate military authorities, must continue to undertake corrective action, as appropriate, to address and remedy the inappropriate proselytizing of cadets at the Air Force Academy.*

(b) REPORT ON PLAN. -

- (1) PLAN.- The Secretary of the Air Force shall develop a plan to ensure that the Air Force Academy maintains a climate free from coercive religious intimidation and inappropriate proselytizing by Air Force officials and others in the chain-of-command at the Air Force Academy. The Secretary shall work with experts and other recognized notable persons in the area of pastoral care and religious tolerance to develop the plan.*
- (2) REPORT. - Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the congressional defense committees a report providing the plan developed pursuant to*

paragraph (1). The Secretary shall include in the report information on the circumstances surrounding the removal of Air Force Captain Melinda Morton from her position at the Air Force Academy on May 4, 2005.

There are two things we do not want at any institution of higher learning, especially the military academies. First, we do not want disrespectful treatment of any student or cadet by their colleagues on the basis of religious differences. Second, we do not want this type of conduct from anyone in positions of authority or in the chain of command. America is blessed by the Air Force Academy cadets who have volunteered to serve their nation and defend our freedom. In taking up arms, those cadets are also agreeing to defend one of America's most cherished rights – religious freedom.